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Safeguarding natural environment in tourism—And the phenomenon of greenwashing

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Abstract: One of the important elements of corporate communication nowadays is to draw attention to the environmentally friendly and sustainable aspects of products and services. However, companies are profit-oriented, their goal is to win consumers and they are not afraid to get more passengers and more income by using green, often completely empty phrases. Despite the topicality of the subject, the need to examine the legal environment is indisputable. From a methodological point of view, this document presents a non-exhaustive list of the most relevant legislation and recommendations. This is also a novelty of the study, as the topic has not been examined from the legislative framework before. The purpose of our article is to present the phenomenon in the field of tourism, to shed light on the difficulties of the regulatory background of greenwashing. Many legal rules have been adopted to protect and safeguard the natural environment. In this article, we will look at some of the legal solutions and documents that attempt to serve this noble cause. All the international, EU and national standards that protect the environment are also relevant in the field of tourism. However, we will not go into these in this article. We will highlight a few standards which we believe may be of particular relevance in the context of tourism. Our selection is rather subjective, as there is no need for it to be exhaustive given the volume and complexity of the legislation, especially as all environmental elements are essential for tourism. As a result of the research, it can be concluded that despite the increasingly sophisticated regulation of the legal environment, there is evidence that companies are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by communication and consumer confidence, often through ignorance, to commit greenwashing.

Keywords: greenwashing; eco-friendly; sustainable; environmentally conscious; legal regulation

1. Introduction

Our study is focused specifically on greenwashing in the tourism sector from legal point of view. Tourism has an enormous eco-footprint. We are seeking answers to the questions: how well can the regulatory environment in this area meet the increasing demands of environmentally conscious consumers? To what extent is tourism businesses able to respond to these expectations, considering the recommendations of international organisations and the legislative framework? Given that it is not possible to manage eco-labels uniformly, we believe that the continuous updating of the legal environment cannot exclude the possibility of greenwashing.

Protecting the environment, preserving and creating environmental security have become inescapable issues of the 21st century. Tourism, as a vitally important pillar of the economy, cannot ignore the environmental dimension. There are several reasons why this is not possible: the natural elements are a key attraction in tourism and one

of the most important considerations when traveling. Thus, water, climate, flora and fauna, clean air and even the special qualities of the soil can be attractions (Michalkó, 2016). On the other hand, these elements and tourism—and the traveler himself—interact with each other, both positively and negatively.

By polluting and destroying the natural environment, destination's values, it is the attraction that is lost. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that it is a matter of life and death for tourism to preserve certain natural elements.

Waterfront holidays still dominate travelers' choices. As well as keeping water clean, water conservation has become a key issue, as water is not unlimited—and this is particularly true in many tourist resorts. It should also be taken into account that tourism is a rather water-wasting industry and most travelers use a lot more water when on holiday. While the average German household needs 130 liters of water per person, the per capita water consumption in a luxury hotel is more than four times that amount, i.e., 600 litres (European Communities, 2009; TourismConcern, 2014). With global warming, these figures will become even more dramatic.

Tourism is also a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions: both transport and food consumption contribute to air pollution. The aviation industry itself is responsible for the emission of 2% of total global CO₂, which means 915 million tonnes of CO₂. The percentage of contribution is relatively stable for 30 years now. The ambitious aim is to cut the emissions to 325 million tonnes until 2050 (IATA, 2024).

It should also be stressed that travelers' consumption habits are different during their travels than during the week, placing a greater burden on the environment and resulting in higher levels of litter. According to the estimations of UNEP, international tourism generates the 14% of total global solid waste. The amount of solid waste generation of tourists depends on many factors, and ranges between 1–12 kg per tourist in only one day (Muñoz and Navia, 2015).

Of course, ironically, it is also the rubbish heaps that become a tourist attraction. This was the case with Fort Bragg beach in California, where, back in the early 20th century, residents used to throw rubbish from the cliffs into the sea. In 1967, the authorities closed the beach and began to clean it up. But the millions of tiny pieces of glass on the beach were too expensive to remove, and the sea had polished the edges smooth, turning the former dumping ground into a tourist attraction (origo.hu, 2024).

Soil erosion and biodiversity loss can also be among the negative impacts – in many cases creating conflicts with local communities (Gonda, 2022).

Among the negative impacts on nature often cited is the destruction of corals, which are threatened not only by divers but also by construction.

Recently, scientists have also identified a new threat from floating islands of rubbish in the sea. Living plants and animals have been found on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which covers 1.6 million square kilometers and contains 79,000 tonnes of plastic. The mountain of rubbish floats some 200 kilometers off the coast of California, and scientists fear that invasive species could travel on it, with potentially serious ecological consequences (Turizmus.com, 2021).

2. Materials and methods

In our study, in addition to the available theoretical literature, we focus on the examination and presentation of the specifically touristic aspects of the greenwashing phenomenon. It is important to recognise that the emergence of the phenomenon can be traced back to a tourism case. We considered it important to define the concept and to summarize its characteristics, also by systematically processing the existing theoretical literature.

The second pillar of the methodology is to present the legal norms and recommendations that aim to ensure the protection of the environment and the conservation of resources in the tourism sector. The literature bases primarily on an examination of international legal conventions and EU regulations, as these provide the framework for the discussion of the topic. A content analysis of the legislative background was carried out in order to provide a survey of the legislative environment that currently seeks to prevent greenwashing. Given the language used in international law and EU law, the vast majority of sources are English-language laws and conventions, with those currently in force being included in the analysis.

In this section, we give as examples, on the basis of a subjective selection, the most relevant international standards. Due to the diversity and complexity of legislation from one country to another, this is a non-exhaustive list of the most important laws and recommendations at global and EU level, as the specific provisions of each country on regulatory issues at national level contain additional provisions which cannot be included in this article due to its limited scope.

At the end of the article, three examples of the most publicized cases of tourism greenwashing are given to illustrate typical corporate techniques of unethical corporate social responsibility.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Greenwashing—The origin of the term

The phenomenon of greenwashing dates back to the mid-20th century. At that time, however, environmental awareness was a major challenge and expectation, especially for large industrial companies. The concept was referred to as ecopornography in the 1970s (Mander, 1972 cited in Kántor, 2020; Turner, 2008).

The concept itself first appeared in the context of tourism in 1986, when Jay Westerweld put it on paper in connection with the green, but supposedly cost-optimizing, tender for a hotel on the island of Fiji. The sign in the hotel bathroom read: 'Save the planet... The decision is in your hands. The towel on the shelf means 'I will use it again'. The towel on the floor means 'Exchange, please, thank you'. Thank you for helping to conserve the Earth's vital resources.' (Guo et al., 2018; Sebastião et al., 2020; Wolniak, 2015).

Kántor's article (2020) perfectly illustrates that the term was first coined in a decade that saw three very serious industrial disasters: the 1984 gas leak in Bhopal, India, the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident and the 1989 Exxon Valdez tanker ecological tragedy in Alaska.

Subsequently, both countries and the public have set much higher standards for the environmental responsibility of large companies, compliance with which has been a condition for their image and hence for the retention and survival of their customers.

However, as environmental awareness spread to the lives of ordinary people, it was no longer only large companies that were confronted with the new green expectations of more conscious consumers, but also smaller firms and businesses. Several authors on the subject believe that green practices have become a dominant factor in economic life (Porter and Kramer, 2006; Antunes et al., 2015; Wolniak, 2015), which has also led to a market demand for ‘green products’ (Chang and Chen, 2013; Chenet et al., 2014).

Today, the meaning of the term has changed a lot. The following definitions have emerged from the writers on the subject, without claiming to be exhaustive:

According to Fidrich (2003), “greenwashing covers the subtle public relations strategy employed by nature-destroying giant corporations that use the language of environmental activists to appear environmentally friendly”.

According to Futerra’s (2008) research, the word greenwash became part of the English language in 1999, when the Oxford English Dictionary described its meaning as ‘disinformation spread by an organization etc. that attempts to project an environmentally responsible image to the public; an organization etc. (Oxford English Dictionary 10th edition, cited in Futerra, 2008, p. 8). According to Delmas and Burbano (2011), ‘the practice of greenwashing can be seen as a positive communication of poor environmental performance’.

This practice, which makes services, companies or businesses appear sustainable without any real action behind it or certification, is greenwashing. There are—of course—businesses that set standards for environmentally friendly products and services, contributing to sustainability goals while striving to provide excellent experiences for travelers (Rahim, 2020).

Reacting to international trends, the Hungarian Competition and Industry Authority (hereinafter: GVH) has also defined greenwashing, stating that ‘The most obvious way for a company to ‘greenwash’ a product is to claim in marketing communications that it is environmentally friendly, or that it is made of recycled materials, or that its packaging is considered to be so, or that it is produced using renewable energy—when there is no basis in reality. This is of course an unfair commercial practice’ (GVH, 2016).

The European Parliament defines greenwashing as the practice of creating a false impression about the environmental impact or benefits of a product, which may mislead consumers.

However, the regulation of this phenomenon, the detection of cases and the ‘damage’ caused by misleading communication by companies is difficult to detect, given the lack of legal regulation of the concept.

It is also worth quickly adding that, since the 1980s, the vast majority of hotels still display signs similar to the Fiji case. If we do not want to be in bad faith, we must accept the fact that, in many cases, optimising costs is also the key to sustainability criteria.

The question may arise as to how the above sins are (or are not) reflected to consumers. A survey conducted by the European Commission in 2020 produced the

results marked on **Figure 1**:

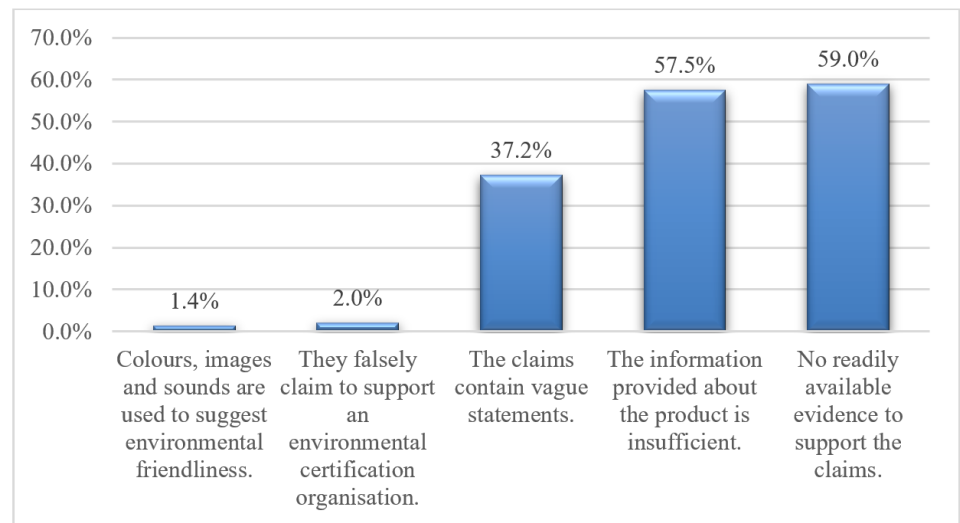


Figure 1. Methods of Greenwashing.

Source: European Commission 2020 based on Infosozlg (Parliamentary Office) 2021.

3.2. Greenwashing—The origin of the term

TerraChoice (2010), an environmental marketing company, created the ‘seven sins of greenwashing’ classification, which has since been cited in numerous publications. The company produced the first comprehensive study of greenwashing. The seven cardinal sins they uncovered:

- 1) Sin of hidden trade-offs (recycled materials that are not manufactured with sustainability in mind, e.g. recycled textiles);
- 2) Sin of no proof (environmental, corporate claims that the company does not provide other evidence to support, e.g. a certificate, on the product);
- 3) Sin of vagueness (a claim that is not properly substantiated, e.g. animal-free products, or the use of the term non-toxic because the ingredient is NOT toxic in the quantity specified);
- 4) Sin of worshiping false labels/irrelevant information (stating a fact that does not make a product or service greener because of the company’s voluntary and responsible action, but is imposed by underlying regulation, e.g. using false images, without content, own ‘trademarks’, logos, e.g. eco-friendly, eco-safe);
- 5) Sin of irrelevance: (communication about a product that may be true but is irrelevant, e.g. CFC-free products – as CFCs are banned by law, not the result of a responsible policy by the company);
- 6) Sin of the lesser of two evils (a campaign that takes a small step to divert suspicion from a more serious environmental problem – TUI case study);
- 7) Sin of fibbing (instances where, when called upon by the authorities, data are disclosed which are not credible, not certified – Ryanair case example).

It can be seen that in all the above cases, an independent certification body is the main gap in terms of whether the product/business actually meets the criteria to be truly guided by sustainability and green principles.

In an oft-cited study, Scanlan (2017) points out that half-truths, fibs, obfuscation and tricks to deceive to a greater or lesser extent characterize green painting.

The comprehensive study has since become an important starting point, as, as Markham and co-authors (2014) put it, it helps to more accurately detect and understand the ‘green mysteries’ of a company or product.

However, it should be stressed that the seven sins mentioned above are primarily interpreted at the product level. In Scanlan’s research on oil companies, he sought to interpret greenwashing at the company level, adding six additional crimes to the seven TerraChoice crimes, but these are now specific to the activities of companies (Scanlan, 2017; Sebastião et al., 2020 own examples for tourism).

- 1) The sin of false hopes: instances in corporate communications that create false hope in the mind of the customer (e.g. certain developments that are communicated as sustainable, eco-friendly, are actually very dangerous for the environment – e.g. electric scooters, bicycles, car batteries);
- 2) The Sin of fear-mongering: exploiting political and economic uncertainty, encouraging consumers to buy certain products and technologies, otherwise they may feel unsafe. Scanlan points out that global wars and instability create fear, the shift of which changes public perceptions of risk (examples include the «bulk purchase» of toilet paper in the Covid-19 period, food hoarding);
- 3) The sin of broken promises: e.g. investments contribute to sustainable development, but this is not at all justified (e.g. Hilton’s investment in the Maldives);
- 4) The sin of injustice: corporate communication that extols the benefits to those who benefit from the company’s activities but do not suffer the harms (parking, hotel developments, attraction developments, since a city or town benefits from them, but they can be extremely disruptive to nearby residents);
- 5) The sin of hazardous consequences: distracting attention from the risks, even by focusing on another ‘sin’ (deforestation when ski slopes are built, development of coastal areas);
- 6) The sin of profits over people and the environment: all corporate activities where the company puts profit above nature and people can be included here. This counts as the biggest greenwashing.

Of course, the list is endless and can be further chiseled and many other sins can be added. The creativity of companies is limitless and until a uniform certification system is developed to guarantee the conditions under which the now-sounding term «green» can be used, even by sector, legislators will be chasing trends.

The Consumer Protection Cooperation Network (CPC-Net), composed of the European Commission and national consumer authorities (Hungary was represented by the GVH in the study), conducted a survey of online advertising in autumn 2020. The survey was carried out by scanning websites, reviewing 344 websites. Of these, 42% of cases revealed false product claims, misleading or unfair commercial practices (Parliamentary Office, 2021).

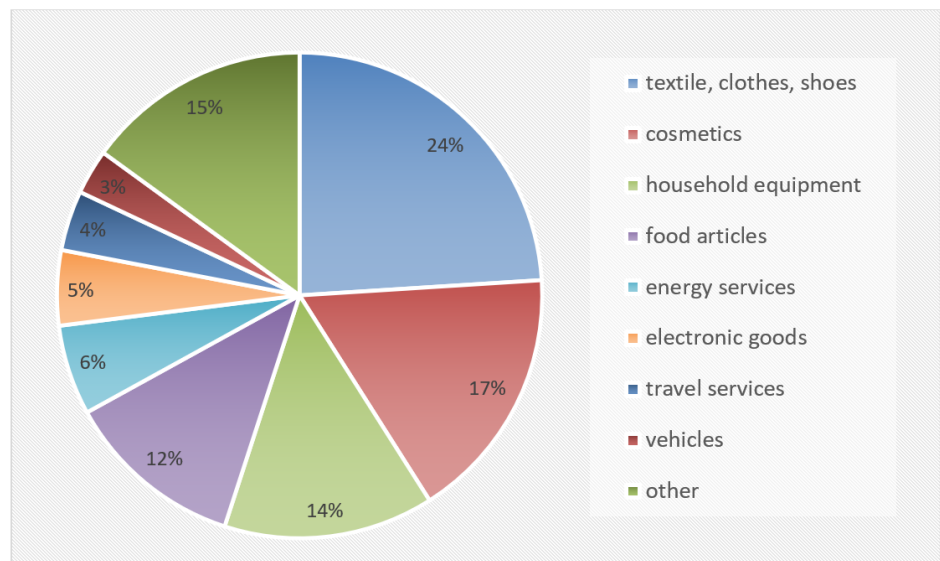


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of sectors covered by the survey, 2020.

Source: According to Parliamentary Office, 2021. own edition.

The **Figure 2** above shows that 14% of travel services communicated falsely about the sustainability and environmental friendliness of their services. Based on the above, a few examples of the most relevant cases have been selected.

3.3. Cases of greenwashing in tourism

The first case involving tourism has already been described in this article above in relation to the Fiji hotel room. However, this is just one of many examples.

One of the most highly publicized tourism greenwashing cases concerned the Hilton hotel chain, which lives up to its name, back in 2006. The hotel chain has always placed a strong emphasis on social responsibility and environmental concerns. However, one of its investments went too far, as a company promoting ethical tourism, Tourism Concern, accused it of cutting down a number of palm and mangrove trees on Mandhoo Island for the Hilton resort complex on Rangali and Rangalifinolhu islands. The activists also claim that Hilton Hotels' communications have greatly exaggerated its community work on Mandhoo Island and that its pledge of long-term support after the tsunami is untrue. Hilton's communication does not contribute to positive environmental practices, but is very much for profit (Tark and Oh, 2021).

In a speech at a conference on social responsibility and tourism in Singapore, Tourism Concern CEO Tricia Barnett used Hilton's operations in the Maldives to claim that the global hotel chain is not interested in adopting 'socially and environmentally responsible business practices' (Simpson, 2006).

Naturally, the hotel chain's head of communications rejected the accusations in the strongest possible terms and took a stand against the activists' position. However, Hilton CEO Ian Carter accused Tourism Concern of spreading 'false and defamatory' allegations against Hilton Maldives. 'I am extremely disappointed by the nature of this sensationalist campaign', he said angrily in an open letter (Lallemand, 2023).

In 2020, Ryanair, one of the most popular low-cost airlines, was accused of trying to be greener in its corporate social responsibility. In the case, Ryanair was accused of greenwashing after the UK's advertising watchdog banned an advertising campaign

claiming that the airline had the lowest carbon emissions of the major European airlines.

Ryanair's advertisement claimed that the airline had 'the lowest carbon footprint of any major airline' based on CO₂ emissions per passenger and per kilometer traveled, because Ryanair has the youngest fleet, the highest seat occupancy on flights and the newest and most fuel-efficient engines. However, the Advertising Standards Authority questioned the veracity of the claim, given that one of the tables used by Ryanair to support its claims was dated 2011, which the Authority said was 'poorly suited to support a comparison in 2019'. The watchdog also added that several well-known airlines are not included in the table, making the measurement and its credibility unclear. On the basis of the above, the screening of the advertisement in its original form was not authorised by the regulator, to which a Ryanair spokesperson responded: 'Ryanair is disappointed and surprised that the Advertising Standards Authority has taken this decision, as Ryanair has fully complied with advertising rules, cooperated with regulators and provided documentation that met all the necessary justifications' (Oaks, 2020; The Guardian, 2020).

However, even travel agencies, like hotels and airlines, do not always behave in a completely ethical way when advertising their services. This is illustrated by a relatively recent news story about the TUI logo change. The company has replaced the usual red smile logo on its social networking sites with a green leaf-shaped logo. Many immediately accused the company of greenwashing the change, arguing that it had stated sustainability goals, but what factual changes actually justify the new logo? 'We already have a candidate for the biggest greenwash of 2023! And the honor goes to... TUI for their new green logo', writes Maxime Van der Meerschen, co-founder of GiveActions on LinkedIn. She adds, 'TUI has quietly changed its logo on LinkedIn and Twitter. In fact, they have launched their 'sustainability agenda' to plan their emissions reductions. Which is fine. But since when does a plan to be carbon neutral by 2050 justify such a logo change?' (Lallemand, 2023).

Similar logo changes have previously been made by fast food chain McDonald's (changing the red background to green) and CocaCola (launching a green labeled soft drink), but they have not escaped suspicion of greenwashing.

The above case studies illustrate that it is very difficult to judge individual cases, as even the most sustainability-minded companies can be immediately targeted by activists if they launch a campaign or change their logo too early or not carefully thought through.

A well-developed certification scheme and the issuing of a validated certificate may be the solution.

3.4. Legal background analyses

The law has its own tools to fight environmental degradation, with many legal norms in place to protect it—but these legal tools can only be a drop in an ocean. In this article we will look at some of the legal solutions and documents that have attempted to serve this noble cause. All international, EU and national standards that protect the environment are relevant in the field of tourism. However, we will not go into these in this article. We will highlight a few standards which we believe may be

of particular relevance in the context of tourism. Our selection is, of course, rather subjective, as there is no need for it to be exhaustive given the volume and complexity of the legislation—especially given that all environmental elements are, without exception, essential for tourism.

In our overview, we will not only mention binding norms, but also those soft, non-legally binding documents and decisions whose importance is indisputable and which may become legal norms in the future.

3.4.1. The efforts of international organizations, international conventions and other documents

Among the international conventions, only two international treaties with a direct link to tourism are mentioned. The 1973 Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) controls international trade in endangered species. It is an almost entirely global agreement, with 182 states and the EU party to it. The convention divides the 36,000 or so species into three appendices according to the degree to which they are threatened by international trade: either trade in them or in any products made from them is banned or they must be authorized (CITES, 2023). Tourists can easily be seduced by a local souvenir, food speciality, curiosity or curiosity—despite all their bad intentions, out of sheer ignorance—and take out as a gift a product made from a species protected under the Convention. Thus, crocodile skin bags, boots, fur made from the fur of big cats, or even simple-looking necklaces made of shells or coral, which are in breach of the regulations, and are subject to severe penalties. There have been a number of instances where awareness-raising leaflets have been produced for tourists on the subject, for example in Greenland and to protect wildlife in the Caribbean (Government of Greenland, 2017; Caribbean Travelers' Guide, 2019). Similar information material would be much needed in the future.

Another global international convention is the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The sites it protects are among the most visited destinations worldwide. The Convention also protects sites that are natural heritage sites. Its importance lies, among other things, in the fact that states commit themselves to the preservation, protection, research and management planning of protected natural sites, but also to the prevention of threats to them (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972).

The other documents of this international organization, which are not legally binding, are also of great importance and show the way in which the international community's thinking has evolved over the last few decades.

The UN World Tourism Organisation is one of the most active organizations in the relationship between tourism and the environment. The Manila Declaration of 1980 already states that tourism resources are a common heritage of mankind that deserves protection; and that tourism must not damage the natural environment (Gonda, 2022; Manila Declaration on World Tourism, 1980). The Acapulco Document adopted two years later reaffirms the previous statements and emphasizes that the environment must be taken into account in tourism development (Acapulco Document, 1982).

Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code (1985) obliges travelers not only to respect the culture and customs of the host country, but also to protect the destination's

wildlife and other natural resources and treasures.

The Charter for Sustainable Tourism (1995) states that tourism development must be based on sustainability, i.e., it must be ecologically viable in the long term, economically viable and ethically and socially equitable for the local community. It also emphasizes the need for cooperation between stakeholders, the environmental impact of transport and the importance of recycling (Charter for Sustainable Tourism, 1995; Gonda, 2022).

In 2002 the Québec Declaration on Ecotourism was adopted under the joint auspices of the World Tourism Organization and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), stating that ecotourism embodies all elements of sustainability and should be promoted as such, and making recommendations to authorities at different levels, international organizations, local communities to promote ecotourism (Québec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002). In the same year, the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism (2002) was adopted by the Responsible Tourism Partnership and Western Cape Tourism at a conference held prior to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (2002) and the resulting Tourism Ethics Framework Convention (2019) are indispensable documents in the review of this topic. The importance of the Code of Ethics—which is not a binding document, but is indisputable due to its continuous reporting and the fact that several states have incorporated its principles into their domestic law—is undisputed. Its third article requires all stakeholders in tourism to protect ecosystems, biodiversity and the natural environment, and to reduce waste. Nature conservation requirements must be taken into account in the planning of tourism infrastructure and eco- and nature-based tourism must be considered as promoted forms of tourism, as in the Quebec Declaration. Environmental impact assessments and studies should be carried out when tourism is developed. Since then, the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics has been adopted on the basis of the Code of Ethics, but has not yet entered into force due to lack of ratification (UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics, 2019; Gonda, 2022).

Several documents have also been adopted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The tourism industry's specific commitment to climate action is reflected in the Glasgow Declaration, which was adopted in 2021 under the auspices of the One Planet Network's Sustainable Tourism Programme. It was developed with the participation of a number of organizations including UNWTO, UNEP, Tourism Declares, Travel Foundation and VisitScotland. Any actor in the tourism sector can be part of the Declaration if it commits to halving its emissions by 2030 and reaching net zero by 2050. It also commits to develop and implement a climate action plan within 12 months of signing the document and to report annually (One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, 2021; One Planet, 2023).

The transport industry is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the tourism sector, so the importance of the standards adopted for the sector is not negligible. Both international shipping and aviation have the same target for emission reductions as the Glasgow Declaration: net zero emissions by 2050 (IATA, 2023; IMO, 2021).

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has also produced a Decarbonisation Action Plan following a thorough analysis of the industry (WTTC, 2021).

3.4.2. EU initiatives

Environmental integration is also an important part of the EU's economic development strategy. In 2022, the Commission will issue a comprehensive report on the digital, green transformation of tourism. It sets out a comprehensive action plan to increase the industry's resilience (European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs 2022; European Commission 2023).

The Sustainable Mobility Strategy is of great importance is, which includes a target of a 90 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from transport (European Commission, 2020).

Among the various green certification labels and markings, the EU Ecolabel for accommodation establishments guarantees that the accommodation takes account of environmental requirements (European Commission, 2017; European Parliament 2017). The application of the Community Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is also a help in this respect (European Parliament and European Council, 2009).

EU initiatives include elements aimed at reducing food waste, energy consumption or the use of single-use plastics (EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, 2019; European Commission, 2023a, 2023b). Information and awareness-raising are also important, both to train and increase the knowledge of tourism workers—to acquire green skills—and of travelers (European Commission, 2023c; European Commission, 2023d).

It is worth mentioning the EU's 2024 'Transition patchway for tourism' document. The document is structured around three main priorities for tourism: digitalisation (digital transition), resilience (resilience transition) and ecology (green transition. Greening of tourism companies is defined as a priority, linked to the green transition pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Tourism (European Union, 2024).

In the scope of HOTREC's manifesto (2023) are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hospitality businesses also play a key role in the green transition, and their commitment is essential to avoid greenwashing and to address best practices.

3.4.3. Standards for local authorities

The importance of local decisions and measures taken in a given town or municipality cannot be neglected. There is a very wide range of ways in which local authorities are trying to protect different environmental elements.

Initiatives to promote public transport can also help to reduce air pollution. This includes a move by the small country of Lichtenstein to make public transport free for everyone throughout the country (Turizmus.com, 2020).

Other measures to reduce air pollution include rules to ban certain means of transport from cities. For example, in the summer of 2023, Amsterdam banned cruise ships from the city center (Turizmus.com, 2023a). Although the lagoons in Venice are not declared a monument by local law but by government decree, the restriction is mentioned here because it is similar. From August 2021, the sensitive ecosystem of

the lagoons will also be protected by these provisions (Pianigiani and Bubola, 2021). Even more drastic are the moves to close some of the most popular tourist sites. This is what happened to the Greek island of Chrissi, which was closed by the Cretan authorities because of its special flora and beaches. The environmental authority took the decision because the roots of the Chrissi cedars, which can take root in the sand, were uprooted and the trees, sometimes hundreds of years old, were destroyed (Turizmus.com, 2022). The famous Maya Bay island in Thailand suffered a similar fate in 2018, but a successful rehabilitation programme has allowed the island to be reopened to visitors in 2022. Prior to its closure, only 8% of the corals had not been destroyed, but the programme did involve the relocation of 30,000 corals from a nearby island; half of them survived and have started to grow. Today, swimming is still banned in the famous bay, and a harbor has been built on the other side of the island, preserving the peace of the bay's original inhabitants (Cripps, 2022).

It is also the case that certain objects are prohibited from entering a particular region. This is what happened in the area of Mount Everest, now referred to as the world's tallest rubbish dump. A rule has been made for the entire Khumbu Pasanglhamu administrative region, banning the carrying of disposable plastics from January 2020 (Tourism.com, 2019).

The export of natural assets is regulated by legal standards in several respects. Tourists have a lot to look out for on their holidays and are often not satisfied with traditional souvenirs. This has put Sardinian sand at risk, as tourists are keen to leave with a load of sand in their suitcases, despite the fact that Budelli Island, which is covered in pink sand and has been a national park since 1994, is off limits to visitors. What's more, the trade in Sardinian sand, pebbles and shells has been banned since 2017, and travelers who flout the rules face fines of up to €3000. Even so, in June 2021 alone, forty-one tourists were prosecuted for smuggling 100 kilograms of sand when security at the airport discovered their prized haul (Csáki, 2021).

Finally, and without claiming completeness, the last major group of provisions is the so-called eco-tax on tourists, which is used to maintain, preserve and rehabilitate the natural environment of the destination. Many places have already imposed such a charge on travelers. In New Zealand, the revenue from the tax, introduced in 2019, is used for tourism sustainability projects and investments, while in the Seychelles, a similar tax, introduced in 2023, will be used to support similar objectives, based on the size of the accommodation chosen (Csáki, 2022). In Bali, the special tax is used not only to protect the environment—it is used to clean the sea of plastic waste - but also to support programmes to preserve Balinese culture. In Bhutan, a sustainability development fee has been introduced in the visa application process, and Iceland plans to do the same (Turizmus.com, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d).

4. Conclusion

The novelty of our research lies in its attempt to interpret the main recommendations and legislation governing the protection of the natural environment at a global level. The main limitation of the research was the absence of uniform global regulation in the field of tourism. Due to the open nature of the legislative environment, the focus was primarily on the EU legislative environment and international

recommendations.

Greenwashing is not an unknown phenomenon these days. This unethical form of corporate communication puts profit above the preservation of environmental and social values. Because of the growing presence of the phenomena a trust issue has also arisen, since consumers, travellers have problems in the perception of green statements (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

It is clear that at global, EU and local level, there are various levels of regulation and recommendations to promote the preservation of environmental and built values, but in many cases these are not enough or not effective enough.

In fact, many untruthful communications presenting services and products as environmentally friendly and eco-conscious are non-existent or questionable. Catching these is a major challenge. Most of the time, the average traveler does not even realize that such tricks are being used to squeeze more money out of them. In addition, the capacity of activists is limited, as the sheer volume of advertising and marketing ploys that we encounter on a daily basis, even from businesses in the tourism sector, makes it impossible to filter out all the false claims.

The solution could probably be a legal regulation specifically designed for the sector, an international cooperation that clearly defines the conditions under which certain terms and symbols can be used.

The novelty of our research is that it analyses the greenwashing phenomenon in a legislative framework. It has taken a non-exhaustive look at the main international and EU documents regulating this phenomenon in field of tourism

We have collected the most important international efforts and legal options for the enforcement of ecological aspects and the prevention of greenwashing. The present research could serve as a basis for the future development of a system of indicators that would take into account international aspirations and legal background, which could prevent the phenomenon of green painting in an internationally standardised way and could be applied uniformly as a kind of new eco-certification for tourism operators, guaranteeing that the services they offer actually comply with environmental principles.

The limitation of the research was that, due to the diversity and the sheer volume of legislation, it is not possible to focus on all of the legal texts, so we have included only the most relevant ones.

We intend to continue our research towards a legal analysis of the communication of tourism enterprises.

However, given that the rules developed in such cooperation are only recognised as binding by the states ratifying them, and that it is almost impossible to define these norms precisely, this would certainly not ensure a perfect and unplayable situation, not to mention that the creation of legal norms can never keep up with the rapid adaptation and dynamic changes of the market.

If we are optimistic, we can say that the future belongs to education, in which it is worthwhile to provide education on this phenomenon from a very early age, so that we, as consumers, do not become easy victims of similar phenomena.

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